

## HOW JUNE'S BLOSSOMS WERE NAMED

By Warwick James Price

IN spite of the vagaries of present-day weather, still does the sixth of the months bring in the flowers, "the pretty daughters of the earth and sun," and still, for the wise and curious, is their inherent beauty set off by those quaint old legends of classic association, or by fairy lore more Germanic than Grecian, which have come down to these more prosaic times, concealed in names which are called unthinkingly in every market in the land.

In one corner of the yard rises in purple dignity the iris—its name-parent, remember, was that rainbow messenger of the mighty Juno. Not far off springs up the more modest peony; and its father, as far at least as title may go, was that clever Paeon, physician in ordinary to the deities of high Olympus, who with the roots of this flower healed the wounds of goddesses and heroes. Even now that same tradition lingers, though unwitting of its source, in those country districts where the children wear bead necklaces carved of peony-roots to ward off sickness.

The violet is so-called from hapless Io, the daughter of that ancient river god Inachus, who, when metamorphosed by Juno into a white heifer, was pastured on those tiny purple stars. She was to give name, too, to the Ionian Sea and to the Bosphorus ("cow-carrier") which at another time bore her safely away from Juno's jealous wrath; but the flower which Yale University has since adopted as its own is far indeed from the only one which gossips in its name of those love affairs of the springtime of the ancient world. The syringa, for instance, was once upon a time the nymph Syrinx, attendant on Diana herself and well-beloved of all dryads. Beloved, too, of the great Pan, tradition tells, and fleeing his too-warm embraces, her friends the wood nymphs came to her rescue, transforming her into those very reeds from which the amorous deity promptly fashioned his magic pipes.

Such memories of long-past loves linger in the daffodils, the mint, the laurel and the sad cypress. For the daffodils, white as the driven snow in those earlier days, were the blossoms with which Proserpine's arms were laden when she was carried off by grim Pluto, his ardent touch turning them yellow for all time to come. Proserpine, too, figures again in the story of the mint, for when fickle Pluto had transferred his affections to fair Minthe, the earlier sweetheart avenged herself upon the latter by changing her into the aromatic plant. The laurel was once the nymph Daphne, and the cypress was Cyparissus, both wooed by Apollo during those incognito trips of his when the gay god sought amusement under a shepherd's guise. Daphne, as Syrinx, was given a flower form to save her from unwelcome caresses, but Cyparissus warmly greeted her immortal lover—and so was soon deserted, whereupon she pined away and became foster-mother of the emblem of sorrow.

The April hyacinth tells yet another Apollo story, for its name was once born by the handsome young son of Amyclas, King of Sparta. His beauty appealed to the god, who undertook his education, beginning with the physical training of quoit pitching, but the first disk hurled by Apollo swerved from his hand and crashed into the skull of the little prince. So was he turned into a blossom, whose petals are said by old tradition to bear the exclamations of the sorrowing murderer: "Ai! Ai!" (Alas! Alas!)

That other April bloom, the narcissus, brings in its name another tragic tale. Narcissus was the most beautiful youth of all his land, but as hard-hearted as handsome, so that his spurning of proffered love brought many a nymph to death. "May he too feel the pangs of unrequited affection," prayed grieving Echo, and her prayer was heard by Juno and granted. Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection in a clear mountain

fountain, starved himself to death rather than leave it; and from his body sprang the purple-centered flowers which, with the daffodil and hyacinth, usher in spring.

From the body of another demi-god sprang the myrtle, though his story is of crime rather than of mere self-love. Myrtillus was enamored of Hippodamia; but her father objected to his suit. So this son of Mercury killed the old man, pushing him from a cliff into the sea. Hippodamia promptly hated her suitor as she once had loved him, and watching her opportunity flung him from the rocks at the very place where he had murdered her father. When, days after, his body was found it had become the root-leaf of the myrtle of to-day.

More homely are the tales told of the origins of the names of the celandine and geranium and wall-flower. Celandine, which country folk know as swallowwort, is merely the English spelling of the old Greek word for swallow, for it was with this plant, tradition says, that the mother bird brought sight to her nestlings. The geranium comes to us from the Greek word for crane, *geranos*, since the ancients saw in its crimson petals the very color of the crane's bill. Still another derivative of the plant says that it was once the mallow, but that the sacred clothes of Mohammed, thrown upon it while the prophet bathed in a near-by stream, changed its pale yellow to royal red.

Scotland mothers the wall-flower. Highland legend tells of a lassie, fair of course and loving, but immured in a baronial castle, who stumbled one moonlit night while climbing down from her turret chamber to meet the gallant of her heart's choice. Thus it runs:

Love, in pity to the deed  
And her luckless, loving speed,  
Turned her to this plant we call  
Now the Flower of the Wall.

The reminiscent catalogue may be extended almost at will. Some names come down to to-day embodying odd beliefs—as that of the heliotrope, which springs from two Greek words meaning the sun and to turn; the ancients thinking the plant always kept its little face sunward. Other names renew the odd imaginings of older times—as that of the glowing nasturtium, which in derivation from the Latin means only "little twisted nose." Still others are purely poetic, as mignonette, the diminutive of "Mignon" or darling; or again, pansy which is the Anglicized form of the French *pensée* (thought) the queer man-faced blossoms typifying recollection and affection. "To study flowers is to study history, science and *belles lettres* as well as mere botany."

## The Sweet Girl Graduate

By Frank Dempster Sherman

Minerva's out of college.

And calls herself A. B.,  
Although I must acknowledge  
It's difficult to see:

For my part, I prefer to  
Forget how much she knows,  
And I should liken her to  
A rose.

A Bachelor—Minerva—  
And wearing such a hat!

I didn't think they'd serve a  
Girl graduate like that!

A bachelor much better  
Has been hers in the past,

And that one hopes to get her  
At last.

I'm glad her education

Is finally complete.

From careful observation

She still is fair and sweet.

If luck does not forsake her,

I hope, some happy day,

Love's Faculty will make her

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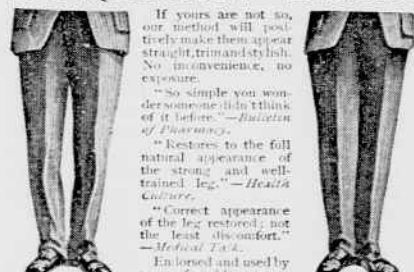
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